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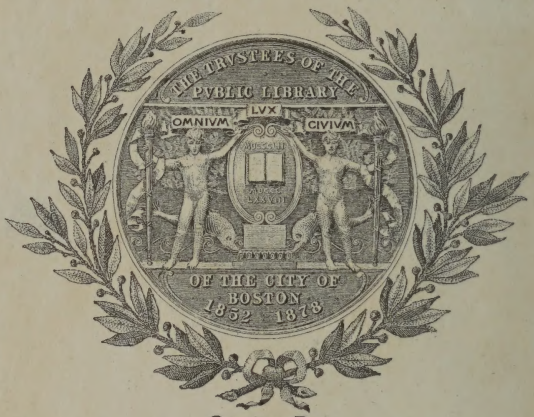


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# *The Man with the Branded Hand*

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# The Man With the Branded Hand

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Harwich High School Prize Essay

1902

*By* Mabel Weekes

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# The Man with the Branded Hand

WITH a view to stimulating research into events of local interest in Cape Cod towns small prizes have occasionally been offered to members of the High Schools for such material as they could secure. The successful competitor gave for publication, or other use, the prize essay. The brief production herewith presented brings to the forefront a man who won for himself a place in Anti-Slavery history, and it is a pleasure as well as a source of pride to learn in brief what he wrought for his despised brother. Cape Cod is fruitful in other than historical lore, and there is hardly a Cape town that cannot contribute something. The writer can readily call up a dozen subjects — historical, geological, genealogical — which would find a body of readers outside of Barnstable County. Would that essays on these subjects might be printed and judiciously distributed.

## The Man with the Branded Hand

CAPE COD has been the birthplace or home of many people who have been well-known in different ways, but of none perhaps whose history is so interesting as that of Captain Jonathan Walker. And well it may be! The people of the United States who believe in the freedom of all classes alike (as they all now undoubtedly do) owe a debt of gratitude to him, and also to others who were his companions in such a noble purpose as helping to obtain liberty for the oppressed colored people.

Jonathan Walker was born in Harwich, March 22, 1799, the same year that George Washington died. His younger days were spent on his father's farm; and in 1816, at the age of seventeen, he commenced his life upon the sea; this was really the beginning of his eventful career.

Two years later, very ill, thousands of miles from home, and with no companions except the natives, he was landed on an island in the midst of the Indian Ocean.

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After a short interval spent on the sea and in the shipyards, he accepted the invitation of Benjamin Lundy to assist in colonizing in Mexico some slaves who had escaped from bondage, but the enterprise failed.

The next year he, together with his son and another companion, was cast ashore on the Mexican coast. They were attacked by robbers, and Captain Walker and his son escaped by swimming out into the open sea. Their companion, however, was shot by the pirates. The two who had escaped swam ashore at nightfall, and after enduring many hardships, at length reached Pensacola. From there the captain went to New Bedford, where his family lived, and brought them to reside in Florida.

For some time he had been extremely interested in the subject of anti-slavery, and, in 1844, when four slaves came to him, and asked him to help them obtain their freedom, he gladly offered to do what he could. Plans were made to meet on the shore just below the city at midnight.

They left the shore in a small open boat, fearing discovery if they attempted to use a more conspicuous one, passed Florida Keys safely, and the blacks were beginning

to rejoice over their now almost certain freedom, when they sighted a United States revenue cutter, which had been sent in pursuit.

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The cutter took them back to Pensacola, where the slaves were returned to their masters, and Captain Walker was seized and imprisoned. This was the beginning of the widest famed event in his life. When captured, the hot tropical sun and exposure to every kind of weather had produced such an effect on him as to render him so ill that he was unable to walk to the prison except with the aid of two men.

The crowd of spectators were almost frenzied with anger at the attempt of Captain Walker to liberate the slaves, and would have lynched him had not the sheriff who had him in charge kept them off with drawn revolvers.

The cell allotted him was damp and unclean, without either a chair, a bed, or a table; in such a foul place, fit rather for brute than man, he spent eleven whole months with twenty pounds of iron weighing down his tired and aching limbs, and his body racked with pain and disease!

And yet before he died, he forgave with his whole soul those heartless men for all they had done to him! When he who finds

it hard to forgive those whom he thinks to have somehow wronged him, let him think of the example of this noble and Christian man, who had infinitely more to forgive.

No one who has not been placed in the same circumstances can realize what that life was. Often while in jail he was tortured in mind by the cruel treatment of the slaves. In his "narrative" he tells many pathetic stories of their ill-treatment; of their being whipped fifty or sixty blows with a rawhide, their cries often reaching his ears; of their being thrown into jail for the most petty offenses, such as being out in the street after a certain time in the evening, etc.

At length he was taken to court and tried. The sentence was this: To be placed in the pillory on the public highway for one hour; branded on the right hand with the letters "S. S."; pay a fine of $150, and the expenses of court. While in the pillory he was rotten-egged by the mob, and the bandage put on the victim's face to protect it was rudely snatched off.

The branding took place after the hour had expired, the "S. S." being burned into the palm with a red-hot iron. The first blacksmith who was asked to make the iron (which was made for the occasion) refused

to do it. The second made it, but would not allow his forge to be used to heat it.

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At last, however, it was heated to a white heat, and the letters which originally meant "Slave Stealer," but which Whittier has beautifully termed, "Slave Savior," were burned into his flesh. After the branding took place, he was again taken to jail, there to stay until he could collect sufficient money to pay the fines.

He wrote to several people in hope of getting their aid or influence, and created much enthusiasm among the justice-loving people of Massachusetts. In Harwich, especially, influential men heralded abroad the cause of Captain Walker, and succeeded at last in raising the required sum.

Captain Walker was then set free. In the last two years he had learned perfectly the true phases of slavery, better perhaps than almost anyone. The next four years he devoted his time and talent in lecturing in all parts of the country on anti-slavery subjects. He also wrote an essay on the same theme.

In 1863, he and his family removed to Lake Harbor, Michigan. Here he owned a small fruit farm, and managed, by its products, to make a comfortable living for himself and wife. He lived there until he died.

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In the autumn of 1877, his health, which had been so good all his life, gradually began to fail, and the best medical aid that could be had was of no avail against the death-angel. He died on the 30th of April, 1878, at the age of seventy-nine years.

The life which held up to the people such an example of Christian faith and sympathy and such integrity of heart, had now gone to receive its reward for fulfilling against all odds the divine commandment, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you." It was truly said: "He never hated a man because he was poor, or because he was ignorant, or because he was black."

The "branded hand" has been beautifully immortalized by the Quaker poet, who was a great worker in behalf of the slaves:

"Then lift that manly right hand
Bold ploughman of the wave,
Its branded palm shall prophesy
Salvation to the slave.
Hold up its fire-wrought language,
That whoso reads may feel
His heart swell strong within him,
His sinews changed to steel."

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